

Statement by Judy Sanchez, senior director of corporate communication and public affairs at U.S. Sugar Corp.

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Farmers realize that it is impossible to predict or prepare for the vagaries of our weather and the complexities of our regional water system. No one likes Lake Okeechobee discharges, and no one is asking to keep any higher levels in Lake Okeechobee than the schedule allows. Lake Okeechobee has an official schedule that was developed during a very public and very transparent process that involved members of almost every stakeholder group. There is a problem when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers throws that due process out the window to dump water outside of that schedule. Unfortunately, the Corps is basically rolling the dice with water that South Florida depends upon during dry times. Water for the lake, water for food, water for the Everglades, and as certain Everglades groups like to point out—drinking water for more than six million people in Southeast Florida. If the Corps can ignore their own process for managing Lake Okeechobee for one reason this year, then they can do it any year, for any other reason. That is a very dangerous precedent to set and the reason for our lawsuit.

Most importantly, farmers aren't the only ones worried about water. Here's what the experts at the University of Florida's Sea Grant College Program say about the consequences of low lake levels:

#### Consequences of Holding the Lake Lower and Future Options

The current LORS 2008 is 1.25 feet lower than Run 25 and WSE. This equates to, on average, more than 500,000 acre feet of lost storage capacity in the lake. As a result, unless a new regulation schedule restores some or all of that capacity, there may be insufficient water stored in the regional ecosystem to provide all of the environmental and water-supply benefits expected to happen when CERP is complete. This is because, as noted earlier, the lake is the main place in the regional system to hold water in the dry season and then make it available for restoration south of the lake in the dry season. Options to make up for the lost lake storage include surface storage in other reservoirs beyond the capacity in the CERP plan, dispersed storage on land, or underground storage. Or the bands could be raised in a new regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee.

<http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/SG/SG15400.pdf>